



MA English Part I



Paper V

American Literature

(Selected Poems – Sylvia Plath & Adrienne Rich)

Selected Notes
Questions & Answers

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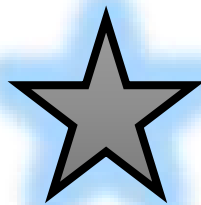
Sylvia Plath

(1936-1967)

Life and Works

Sylvia Plath was born in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts. Sylvia's interests in writing and art started developing during her public school years in Wellesley, Massachusetts, and at Smith College, where she attended on scholarships. Her extensive publications of poems and fiction led to her selection for the magazine in 1953. The depression that was endemic in her father's family troubled her during her junior year; when her mother sought treatment for her, she was given bi-polar electro convulsive shock treatments as an outpatient. In August 1953, she attempted suicide by overdosing on sleeping pills. Recovered after six months of intensive therapy, Sylvia returned to Smith and her usual academic success. In the fall of 1955, she sailed for England. Plath studied hard. She met Ted Hughes, a Cambridge poet; she felt that life with him would be ideal. The two were married in London on 16 June 1956, accompanied by Sylvia's mother.

The marriage was for six years a strong union of supremely dedicated writers. Sylvia's wholehearted enthusiasm for Hughes's work, which she sent off to the competition that won him fame, was balanced by his steadfast belief in her exceptional gift. They lived in Massachusetts (Cambridge, Northampton--where Sylvia taught for a year at Smith--and Boston), then in London and Devon. A daughter, Frieda, was born in April 1960, and a son, Nicholas, in January 1962. Sylvia Plath's early poems--already drenched in typical imagery of glass, moon, blood, hospitals, and skulls--were mainly 'exercises' of work by poets she admired: Dylan Thomas, W. B. Yeats, Marianne Moore. After 1960 her poems increasingly explored the surreal landscape of her imprisoned psyche under the looming shadow of a dead father and a mother on whom she was resentfully dependent. During the summer of 1962 her marriage to Hughes began to collapse; she was devastated when she learned that he had been unfaithful to her. Although she and Hughes travelled to Ireland together in September, the marriage was by then in ruins, and in October she asked her husband to leave for good. It was after Hughes's departure that Plath produced, in less than two months, the forty poems of rage, despair, love, and vengeance that have chiefly been responsible for her immense posthumous fame. Throughout October and November of 1962 she rose every day at dawn to take down, as from dictation, line after miraculous line of poems like 'The Bee Meeting', 'Stings', 'Daddy', 'Lady Lazarus', 'Ariel', and 'Death & Company', as well as those heartbreaking poems to her baby son: 'Nick and the Candlestick' and 'The Night Dances'. In the early morning of 11 February, she gassed herself. In the quarter-century following her suicide Sylvia Plath has become a heroine and martyr of the feminist movement.



Q.1. “THE ARRIVAL OF THE BEE BOX”

BY: SYLVIA PLATH

Critical Appreciation

*I ordered this, clean wood box
Square as a chair and almost too heavy to lift.*

The poem “The Arrival of the Bee Box” was written in 1962. It contains seven stanzas which are made up of five lines and an extra line at the end of the poem. Although it is a very complex poem, yet it has a simple origin, i.e. recalling a personal incident when a bee box arrived. The story of the poem concerns a task with a bee box. As with all of Plath’s poems, this poem is notable for Plath’s typical depressed state of mind. Plath explores the complex feelings of power and powerless associated with bee-keeping. Her anxiety seems to be a symbol of depression in her life.

In this poem, the poetess says that she bought a heavy wooden box, which seems like a burial box. She hates the noise produced by the swarm of bees in it. Though, the bee box is locked, yet she feels it dangerous for her, but at the same time she cannot keep herself away from it. She cannot see what is happening, because the box is dark from inside. Realizing the bees hungry, she decides to let them free and stand motionless, so that the bees take her for a tree and ignore her presence. She is wearing a protecting dress and a black veil to keep herself safe from their stings. She soothes herself by thinking that they would not attack her because she is no source of honey for them. In the end, she decides to free them the next day, and says that the box is only a temporary prison for the bees.

*The box is locked, it is dangerous.
I have to live with it overnight
And I can’t keep away from it.
(The Arrival of the Bee Box)*

“The Arrival of the Bee Box” can be read on two different levels, the literal and the metaphorical. On simple level, it seems to be about Plath’s reactions to the delivery of a bee box, because she is merely concerned and anxious about how to deal with a swarm of bees in the bee box. On deeper level, the bee box can be regarded as a symbol for her unhappy inner thoughts and feelings. The bees symbolize the poet’s unconscious self which seeks freedom.

Understanding her poetry requires some understanding of her short and troubled life. She was struggling with a failed marriage and the bringing up of her two young children. Here the poetess is the owner of the box but she is afraid of the box because inside the box, the bees are humming furiously. Therefore, she forgets her sense of ownership. She becomes too much afraid of the bees. It seems the bees control her and the owner does not control the bees at all. Sylvia probably is in search of her true self. She decides to set them free the next day.

*I am no source of honey
So why should they turn on me?
Tomorrow I will be sweet God, I will set them free.
(The Arrival of the Bee Box)*

In fact, she wants to set her dark thoughts and emotions free, and she can be that only through her death. May be she could have written this poem while she was thinking about

suicide. In spite of being the owner of the bee box, she swings between the positions of master and slave, oppressor and victim.

As with all of Plath's poetry, this poem is notable for **Plath's typical depressed state of mind**. Sylvia Plath has been feeling herself insecure throughout her life. Sylvia Plath's issues with mental illness and the emotions often influenced her poetry. In the poems "The Bee Meeting" and "The Arrival of the Bee Box", Plath explores the theme of alienation (*separation, isolation*) in several ways. Many of these reflect her own feelings as both poems being as a literal report of events from her life. In "The Bee Meeting" a gathering of beekeepers in the village become sinister as the speaker's fear and confusion escalates (*increases, intensifies*). This could be a reflection of Plath's worries concerning the content of her poetry.

So, alienation is shown in both poems as a very important aspect of the personas that Plath takes on. It is interesting to note that the alienation itself is not what frightens either speaker, and this is probably due to the fact that Plath did not always enjoy the company of others. Particularly during the depressive stages of her illness, which were prevalent after her separation from Hughes at the time she wrote poems.

Sylvia Plath wrote extensively of her own life, her own thoughts, and her own worries. The style of her work is compared to other contemporaries. Plath always endeavored to know herself better through her personal fears, and tried to work through her problematic relationships. For instance, Sylvia tried to understand her mixed feelings about motherhood, and tried to express her rage at her unsuccessful marriage. However, she also explored her own self in different ways.

"She wrote her early poems very slowly. Thesaurus open on her knee, in her large strange handwriting. If she didn't like a poem, she scrapped it entire. She rescued nothing of it."

(Ted Hughes)

Sylvia Plath's poems are very popular among scholars and general readers. Her obvious abstraction has captured audience all inspired and motivated by her poetry. Plath's devotion to her craft is apparent in her works. She command an insightful voice on her works by being steadfast, honest and direct and not being afraid to openly contemplate deepest anxieties, complexities, joys and fears. Sylvia Plath herself has said:

"I believe that one should be able to control and manipulate experiences, even the most terrifying... be able to manipulate these experiences with an informed and intelligent mind."

Sylvia Plath's abilities as a writer enable her to blend so many elements: intellectual aspects of learning, personal emotional experiences and general human experiences. Plath relates her own painful experiences in the form of dramatic monologues. Mostly, she uses a persona who eventually triumphs over adversity by regaining the self that had been lost before the struggle of the poem.

Emotions and feelings are scattered throughout the poem. Emotions such as distress and sadness are important elements of Plath's poetry. Most of her poems revolve around these emotion which everybody can relate to. Hence, the popular appeal it holds to both scholars and general readers alike. Plath's successful poetry can be attributed to her ability to express certain themes in a diverse way.

Putting all the above details in a nut-shell, it may be concluded that, the use of unique metaphors, the choice of words and the structure of the poems are the elements which contribute significantly to the understanding and enjoyment of Sylvia Plath's poetry. Plath's art lay in her

ability to transform her sufferings into the powerful language of her characters and thus to address her philosophy of restoration of the world.

“The silence depressed me. It wasn’t the silence of silence. It was my own silence.”
(Sylvia Plath)

Q.2. “ARIEL” Critical Appreciation

*Stasis in darkness.
Then the substance less blue
Pour of tor and distances.*

The poem “Ariel” is one of the masterpieces written by Sylvia Plath. This poem contains ten stanzas which are made up of three lines and an extra line at the end of the poem. The lines are short and uneven. The name “Ariel” refers to following things:

1. The name of Sylvia Plath’s own horse was Ariel. She loved to ride it weekly near the Devon village where she and Ted Hughes had bought a house the year before.
2. Ariel was also the airy spirit in Shakespeare’s last play “The Tempest” written in 1611. In the play, Ariel is a servant to the magician Prospero and symbolizes Prospero’s control of the upper elements of the universe, fire and air.

The poetess seems to be combining these references to “Ariel” in her poems, and creating a context where each of the possible meaning enriches the others.

Sylvia Plath’s husband and fellow poet ‘Ted Hughes’ describing the background of the poem “Ariel”, tells: “Ariel was the name of the horse on which she went riding weekly. Long before (in 1956), while she was a student at Cambridge (England), she went riding with an American friend out towards Grant Chester. Her horse bolted, the stirrups fell of, and she came all the way home to the stables, about two miles, at full gallop, hanging around the horse’s neck.” The poem “Ariel” is based on this very event.

The poem depicts a woman riding her horse in the countryside towards the rising at the very break of dawn. This poem details the ecstasy and personal transformation of the rider that occurs during her journey. **Sylvia Plath is known as a confessional poet**, which means that she wrote highly personal, detailed, and emotional poems. For this reason, we might want to assume that the speaker of "Ariel" is Plath herself. We also know from Plath's husband that she really did have a horse named Ariel who once took her on a wild ride.

*God’s lioness,
How one we grow,
Pivot of heels and kneels!-The furrow*

In her poem, “Ariel”, **Plath explains how she enjoyed horse riding**. This horse riding is nothing but the journey of life. There is deep meaning hidden inside this poem. Each line

stated in each stanza is meaningful and anyone can pick up several meanings from it. The life is bounded between all those tasks which are not that important if we give a wise look at them. Therefore, poet is explaining her own way to enjoy her ride. The ride which goes beyond sun rays is so beautiful. No one can avoid problems in life. These problems may be hot like sun rays but if the person goes with the speed of horse then these problems are nothing.

Ariel is an informative poem which shows true meaning of a life full of problems. One can enjoy this ride only if they have solution to the problems of life else they will sit with hands on hands will making the problem double in strength and become tougher to beat. Poet is looking for this life and seeking new challenges which can attempt to destroy her but she still has strength to face all those with her might and will power.

Sylvia Plath's poetry is highly praised work of the 20th century. It challenges its readers with the complexity of allusions, metaphors and images. It also startles (*surprises, amazes, shocks*) its readers with the force of insight, self-awareness, and psychological intuition (*insight, perception, awareness*). Her poetry is bold, intuitive, touching, suggestive and complex. Many of her poems run the range from simple and charming to terrifying and violent.

Sylvia Plath wrote extensively of her own life, her own thoughts, and her own worries. The style of her work is compared to other contemporaries. Plath always endeavored to know herself better through her personal fears, and tried to work through her problematic relationships. For instance, Sylvia tried to understand her mixed feelings about motherhood, and tried to express her rage at her unsuccessful marriage. However, she also explored her own self in different ways.

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Q.3. “THE BEE MEETING”

Critical Appreciation

*I am exhausted, I am exhausted –
Pillar of white in a blackout of knives.
I am the magician’s girl who does not flinch (show fear or pain).*

Sylvia Plath began the “Bee” poems shortly after moving to the country cottage she had dreamed of, giving birth to her second child. The bee poems assess the speaker’s relation to her neighbours, children, husband, other women and herself, as well as her place in history.

Plath’s father was an entomologist (*a zoologist who studies insects*), specialized in the study of bees. He kept bees in the house during her childhood. Her father could hold a bee in his fist without being stung. Her father helped her to incarnate (*embody, to be alive*), to be part of the world and to act in the world. In England, before the Bee Poems were written, Plath and her husband Ted Hughes had taken up bee keeping as part of self-sufficiency drive.

Once, Plath and Ted Hughes had gone to a local meeting of bee-keepers to purchase a bee colony. There they watched an official bee-man and their local meeting. There were other peoples from neighbouring villages as well. They observed the traditional ritual of transferring the old bee queen to another bee box. The old queen was replace with a virgin bee as a new queen. The old box with the old queen was deserted. It predicted the death of old queen in near future. So happened with Sylvia Plath in real life when only a few months after this incident she committed suicide. Ted Hughes mixed up with the other people, but Sylvia felt a sense of isolation. Sylvia has portrayed that event in her poem “The Bee Meeting”.

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At the conclusion of “The Bee Meeting” Plath’s ego merges with the old Queen she visualizes (*imagines*) her death that is to follow. The end of the poem does not reveal that she is free from threat either because there are threats all around her. The whole poem, from beginning to end, seems to tell of her threat and how the threats still drive at her, making her ever exhausted.

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Q. 4 “MORNING SONG”

Critical Appreciation

*I'm no more your mother
Than the cloud that distills (purify, drips) a mirror
to reflect its own slow
Effacement (wiping out, حستم ہونا، فس ہونا) at the wind's hand.*

The poem “Morning Song” was written in February 1961. Sylvia Plath’s poetry is highly praised work of the 20th century. It challenges its readers with the complexity of allusions, metaphors and images. It also startles its readers with the force of intuition, self-awareness, and psychological insight. “Morning Song” consists of six stanzas of three lines each. It is composed in free verse, and it has neither regular meter no rhyming scheme.

Addressing her newly born child the poetess says that her relation with her husband has caused the birth of and it is as perfect as a golden watch. When the baby utters its first cry, it becomes the part of this world. Though the poetess and her husband are excited at its birth, yet they are standing speechless around its bed, and it does not look them more than a statue placed in a dull museum. She has given birth to the baby like a cloud produces rain which in turn becomes a lake that will reflect the cloud. Here, comparing herself to a cloud that drops its condensed water vapors as rain and disappears from the sky, the poetess suggests that since she has given birth to a child which in her mirror, she herself would disappear like the cloud.

After that, her motherly feelings start awakening, and she says that the child kept on enjoying a peaceful sleep the whole night and its breathing felt her like flickering lights. Then, in a dream she hears some loud sounds and the poetess wakes up in a flurry, and when the child utters a cry, she is filled with motherly affection. When the poetess looks at the sky through the window, the morning is close at hand, and realizing its first morning in this world, the baby also uttering lovely sounds that allure the mother a lot.

*All night your moth – breath
Flickers among the flat pink roses.
I awake to listen:
A far sea moves in my ear.*

“Morning Song” is one of the Plath’s domestic poems, and not of her typical protest poem. This poem also has her typical denseness (*compactness, density*) of meaning like other poems. It has mixture of conflicting emotions felt by a new, young mother after the arrival of her first child. When Sylvia Plath wrote this poem, she had given birth to her daughter Frieda. Just after her birth, Sylvia Plath addresses her. But strangely enough, in the beginning of the poem, she seems devoid of motherly feelings.

In the second stanza, Plath refers to the baby as a statue and something new. It infers that the baby is just something to look at just like a visitor in a museum, rather than embrace like a passionate mother. However, when she lives with the child for some time and the child starts breathing and crying, she feels and expresses her motherly love for her infant.

In the last three stanzas, the emotional estrangement (*alienation, separation, distancing*) changes and she impulsively listens to the sound of her child. She is fascinated by the cry and sleep of the child. Now babble (*murmur, sound*) of her child seems to her a morning song and a bond of love is established between them. In fact, this poem depicts the birth of both – the child and the mother, because mother is defined by motherhood; not by simply giving birth to a child.

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Q.5. You're

BY SYLVIA PLATH

Clownlike, happiest on your hands,
 Feet to the stars, and moon-skulled,
 Gilled like a fish. A common-sense
 Thumbs-down on the dodo's mode.
 Wrapped up in yourself like a spool,
 Trawling your dark as owls do.
 Mute as a turnip from the Fourth
 Of July to All Fools' Day,
 O high-riser, my little loaf.

Vague as fog and looked for like mail.
 Farther off than Australia.
 Bent-backed Atlas, our traveled prawn.
 Snug as a bud and at home
 Like a sprat in a pickle jug.
 A creel of eels, all ripples.
 Jumpy as a Mexican bean.
 Right, like a well-done sum.
 A clean slate, with your own face on.

Critical Appreciation

*Clownlike, happiest on your hands,
 Feet to the stars, and moon-skulled,
 Gilled like a fish.*

The title “You're” has to be placed in front of each phrase of the poem. The title is also a contraction of the verb “you are” contraction links with pregnancy and the poet acknowledges her unborn child's existence. Plath makes use of interesting comparisons through using metaphors and imagery that relates to how she feels about the unborn child. She does not think how the rest of the world would view the baby. In this way she makes the poem have a more personal deeper meaning.

“You're” was written in 1960, three years before Sylvia Plath's death. It is one of her less depressing poems. It consists of two stanzas of nine lines each. The main focus in this poem is on the unborn child which is still in her womb. The poem is just like a monologue. Each line is a description of her unborn baby and her emotions during pregnancy. Though there is no definite word ‘baby’ in the poem, yet it becomes obvious that she is addressing and talking about her unborn baby.

*Wrapped up in yourself like a spool,
 Trawling your dark as owls do.*

In this poem, Sylvia Plath visualizes the unborn baby like a clown showing feats with hands downwards and feet towards the sky. She feels its head like the shape of a full moon. She thinks the child would be an intelligent person and even now it has a common sense of a bird. Plath says that the time of the birth of the baby is near. She feels her baby as a loaf of bread, and believes the child would be successful in life. In spite of all this, she cannot clearly visualize the features of her baby because it is as invisible as something in a deep fog. She is waiting for her baby's birth so impatiently that it feels her like expected mail from a very dear one. She feels the baby fully perfect and calls it a clean slate which reflects the image of unborn baby itself.

The poem is full of motherly feelings and great affections for the baby. The poem covers a range of comparisons to describe the unborn baby. The theme of the poem is the love for her child. The child represents a new start, having its own identity. In this poem, similes and metaphors are used to convey the feelings of a mother in a way that the reader would be able to understand.

Sylvia Plath is known as a confessional poet, which means that she wrote highly personal, detailed, and emotional poems. Plath's style is very confessional because most of her poems are about her experiences rather than mere concepts. She uses her own way of writing and same is the case with writing "You're". Plath's language has a way of breaking apart ideals and bringing the realistic out of a situation. Being very personal in her writing style, she takes ideals and strips them exposing the real situations. This quality of Plath makes her stand prominent among her contemporaries.

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Q.6. SYLVIA PLATH as a Poetess

Plath's Poetry / Style / Salient Features

Plath as a Confessional Poetess

Auto-biographical Elements in Plath's Poetry

"The silence depressed me. It wasn't the silence of silence. It was my own silence."
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Intellectual aspects of learning, personal emotional experiences and general human experiences are the hallmarks of Sylvia Plath's poetry. The collective body of Sylvia Plath's poetry demonstrates her mastery of her craft. Plath has been criticized for her overtly autobiographical work and her suicidal pessimism. A close study reveals that her poetry transcends categorization and has a voice uniquely her own. In most of her poems, Plath relates her own painful experiences in the form of dramatic monologues using a persona who eventually triumphs over adversity by regaining the self that had been lost before the struggle of the poem.

*"How you insert yourself,
Between myself and myself,
Scratch like a cat."*
(Sylvia Plath)

Plath's reputation as a writer and poetess grew steadily after her death. Her collection of poems "Ariel" (1965) firmly established Plath as a major poetess. The collection contains

many of the poems written in the months before she died. She is widely regarded as one of the first feminist poets and icon of the **women's movement**.

Sylvia Plath's poems are very popular among scholars and general readers. Her obvious abstractism has motivated by her poetry. Plath's devotion to her craft is apparent in her works by being steadfast, honest and direct and not being afraid to openly contemplate deepest anxieties, complexities, joys and fears.

The use of **symbols, imagery and metaphors** is one of the salient features of Plath's poetry. For example, "The Arrival of the Bee Box" can be read on two different levels, the literal and the metaphorical. On simple level, it seems to be about Plath's reactions to the delivery of a bee box, because she is merely concerned and anxious about how to deal with a swarm of bees in the bee box. On deeper level, the bee box can be regarded as a symbol for her unhappy inner thoughts and feelings. The bees symbolize the poet's unconscious self which seeks freedom.

*I am no source of honey
So why should they turn on me?
Tomorrow I will be sweet God, I will set them free.
(The Arrival of the Bee Box)*

Understanding her poetry requires some understanding of her short and troubled life. **Autobiographical element** may be traced throughout her poetry. "You're" narrates the feeling of Plath when she was pregnant. Once, Plath and Ted Hughes had gone to a local meeting of bee-keepers to purchase a bee colony. There they watched an official bee-man and their local meeting. There were other peoples from neighbouring villages as well. They observed the traditional ritual of transferring the old bee queen to another bee box. The old queen was replace with a virgin bee as a new queen. The old box with the old queen was deserted. It predicted the death of old queen in near future. So happened with Sylvia Plat in real life when only a few months after this incident she committed suicide. Ted Hughes mixed up with the other people, but Sylvia felt a sense of isolation. Sylvia has portrayed that event in her poem "The Bee Meeting".

Sylvia Plath's poetry is highly praised work of the 20th century. It challenges its readers with the complexity of allusions, metaphors and images. It also startles its readers with the force of insight, self-awareness, and psychological intuition. Her poetry is bold, touching, suggestive and complex. Many of her poems run the range from simple and charming to terrifying and violent.

Plath's poetry is notable for her typical depressed state of mind. Sylvia Plath has been feeling herself insecure throughout her life. Sylvia Plath's issues with mental illness and the emotions often influenced her poetry. In the poems "The Bee Meeting" and "The Arrival of the Bee Box", Plath explores the theme of alienation (*separation, isolation*) in several ways. Many of these reflect her own feelings as both poems being as a literal report of events from her life. In "The Bee Meeting" a gathering of beekeepers in the village become sinister as the speaker's fear and confusion escalates. This could be a reflection of Plath's worries concerning the content of her poetry.

The timeless excellence of Sylvia Plath's poetry lies in the sense of language and of metaphor. Sylvia Plath was a brilliant lyric poetess. In the poems of Sylvia Plath, there is a marked difference in the earlier and later style. However, the change is not sudden, the style keeps on evolving. She found a voice and medium of her own in her poems. Ted Hughes, her husband, in his "Notes on the Chronological Order of Sylvia Plath's Poems" says:

“She wrote her early poems very slowly, Thesaurus open on her knee, in her large strange handwriting. If she didn’t like a poem, she scrapped it entire. She rescued nothing of it.”

Plath is labelled as a **confessional poetess**. The term “confessional” poetry was invented by Prof. M.L. Rosenthal. It applies as well as to Sylvia Plath’s poetry. Rosenthal traces the history of the new confessional poetry back to Romantic aestheticism, where:

“The self seeks to discover itself through the energy of its insights into reality and through the sensuous excitement generated by its experience of reality.”

“Confessional Poetry” is not just an expression of private discomfort – a sort of catharsis or disburdening of private grief. Speaking of Plath’s confessional poetry a critic says:

“At her best, however, Plath is in control (through form and shape) of her materials, which are never allowed to get out of hand as mere “natural” self-expression.”

Sylvia Plath is known as a confessional poet, which means that she wrote highly personal, detailed, and emotional poems. Plath’s style is very confessional because most of her poems are about her experiences rather than mere concepts. She uses her own way of writing. Plath’s language has a way of breaking apart ideals and bringing the realistic out of a situation. Being very personal in her writing style, she takes ideals and strips them exposing the real situations. This quality of Plath makes her stand prominent among her contemporaries.

Sylvia Plath wrote extensively of her own life, her own thoughts, and her own worries, she has often been grouped into the confessional movement of poetry. The style of her work is compared to other contemporaries. Plath always endeavored to know herself better through her personal fears, and tried to work through her problematic relationships. For instance, Sylvia tried to understand her mixed feelings about motherhood, and tried to express her rage at her unsuccessful marriage. However, she also explored her own self in different ways.

In short, the above discussion reveals that the use of unique metaphors, the choice of words and the structure of the poems are the elements which contribute significantly to the understanding and enjoyment of Sylvia Plath’s poetry. Plath’s art is depicted through her ability to transform her sufferings into the powerful language of her characters and thus to address her philosophy of restoration to the world.

“I believe that one should be able to control and manipulate experiences, even the most terrifying ... be able to manipulate these experiences with an informed and intelligent mind.”

(Sylvia Plath)

Q.7. Major themes of Plath's Poetry

**Sylvia Plath as a Feminist / Feminism in Plath's poetry/
Search for the self (Identity)/ Sufferings / Emotions / Unknown
Phobia in Plath's Poetry/ Theme of Death /
Conflicts, Complexities or Ambiguities of Life /
Alienation / Electra Complex / Motherhood**

"The silence depressed me. It wasn't the silence of silence. It was my own silence."
(Sylvia Plath)

The philosophy of theme is not very difficult to understand. It is the central point of a writing around which the whole piece of writing revolves. The themes in most of the writers are belonging to mind or their intellectual capacity. Sylvia Plath has beautifully dealt a lot of themes in her poetry using her intellectual capacity mixed with her personal experiences.

Death is a recurring theme in Sylvia Plath's poetry that occurs in many different ways. However, Plath's early poems exhibited her typical imagery using personal and nature-based depictions. The colossus is replete with themes of death, redemption (*restoration, salvation, recovery*) and resurrection (*rebirth, revival, renaissance*). Throughout her life Sylvia Plath could not forget the ultimately death of her father. In "The Colossus", she tries in vain to put him back together again and make him speak.

Another form of death, i.e. suicide corresponds to her own suicide attempts and eventual death by suicide. Plath's fellow confessional poet and friend Anne Sexton commented:

"Sylvia and I would talk at length about our first suicide, in detail and in depth between the free potato chips. She told the story of her first suicide in sweet and loving detail, and her description in the Bell Jar is just that same story."

Sylvia Plath's poetry is highly praised work of the 20th Century due to its unique themes. It challenges its readers with the complexity of allusions, metaphors and images. It also startles its readers with the force of insight, self-awareness and psychological intuition. Her poetry is bold, touching, suggestive and complex. Many of her poems run the range from simple and charming to terrifying and violent.

The timeless excellence of Sylvia Plath's poetry lies in the sense of language and of metaphor. Sylvia Plath was a brilliant lyric poet. In her poems there is a marked difference in the earlier and later style. However, the change is not sudden, the style keeps on evolving. She found a voice and medium of her own in her poems. Ted Hughes, her husband, says:

"She wrote her early poems very slowly, Thesaurus open on her knee, in her large strange handwriting. If she didn't like a poem, she scrapped it entire. She rescued nothing of it."

Another dominant theme in her poetry is **feminism**. Plath does not appear to be a die-hard feminist like Adrienne Rich but she is more inclined towards its psychological side. She believes that in a patriarchal (*male-dominated, male, male-controlled*) society a woman is always suppressed and dominated not only physically but also mentally and emotionally. In her poetry, she lashes back at everybody who contributed to her near-insanity, especially her husband, male

community in general and the society at large. We get a picture of a woman who is morally wounded, a bleeding victim of this social system. Her poem “Ariel” is a fierce outburst of these feelings.

*Stasis in darkness.
Then the substance less blue
Pour of tor and distances.*

Another important theme in her poetry is that of **maternal** (*motherly, caring*) **affection and creative process through which a woman becomes a mother**. How a child is the part of female body how he is born and what kind of psychological change, a woman experiences through these creative stages. Plath’s poem “You’re” is full of motherly love and care for an unborn child. In this poem, Sylvia Plath visualizes (*imagines*) the unborn baby like a clown showing feats (*acts, tricks*) with hands downwards and feet towards the sky. She feels its head like the shape of a full moon. She is waiting for her baby’s birth so impatiently that it feels her like expected mail from a very dear one. She feels the baby fully perfect and calls it a clean slate which reflects the image of unborn baby itself. This is one of the less depressing poems of Plath that show her affection for the baby in her womb.

Another important theme discussed in her poems is her **personal psychological complexes**. In Freudian terms, Plath was a victim of **Electra complex**. Her father abandoned her in death and caused her hatred of all men. She herself says,

*“I never know the love of a father ... I hated men because
they did not stay around and love me like a father.”*

This “Electra complex” gave birth to other complexes and phobias. Phobia begins with a conflict between instincts and repression. This phobia was a great cause of her suicidal impulse (*instinct, desire, urge*).

A close study reveals that her poetry transcends categorization and has a voice uniquely her own. In most of her poems, Plath relates her own painful experiences in the form of dramatic monologues. In her poems, she tries to find her true **identity**. Her **search for the self** continues. For this purpose, she uses a persona who eventually triumphs over adversity by regaining the self that had been lost before the struggle of the poem.

Plath’s poetry is notable for her typical **depressed state of mind**. Sylvia Plath has been feeling herself insecure throughout her life. Sylvia Plath’s issues with mental illness and the emotions often influenced her poetry. In the poems “The Bee Meeting” and “The Arrival of the Bee Box”, Plath explores the theme of **alienation** (*separation, isolation*).

Emotions, feelings and sufferings may also be taken as themes of Plath’s poetry. Emotions such as distress and sadness are important to the Plath’s poems. Most of her poems revolve around these emotion which everybody can relate to. Hence, the popular appeal it holds to both scholars and general readers alike. We find **unknown phobia** in her poems as well. “Arrival of the Bee Box” and “The Bee Meeting” depict Plath’s feelings and state of mind.

In short, Plath’s successful poetry can be attributed to her ability to express certain themes in such a diverse way. The use of unique metaphors, the choice of words and the structure of the poems are other elements which contribute significantly to the understanding and enjoyment of Sylvia Plath’s poetry.

*“I believe that one should be able to control and manipulate experiences,
even the most terrifying ... be able to manipulate these experiences with
an informed and intelligent mind.”*
(Sylvia Plath)

Adrienne Rich

(Born 1929)

- Born on May 16, 1929 in Baltimore Maryland to Dr. Arnold Rich (Pathology professor at Johns Hopkins) and Helen Rich (pianist and composer).
- She was home schooled until the 4th grade.
- Graduated from Radcliffe College in 1951.
- In 1951, Rich published her first poetry collection, *A Change of World*. Her earlier influences were T.S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, and Robert Frost.
- In 1953, she married Alfred Conrad. Later, she gave birth to 3 sons.
- First change in Rich's poetry style was seen in *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law*, where Rich expressed her political activism towards women's political and social roles.
- In 1966, Rich moved to New York, where she protested the Vietnam War.
- In 1970, Rich broke off her marriage with Conrad. Later, he committed suicide.
- In 1974, Rich refused the acceptance of the National Book Award for *Diving into the Wreck*, claiming to celebrate it in the name of all women.
- In 1976, Rich came out to the world about her lesbian relationships in her book, *Twenty-One Love Poems*.
- Rich has produced over 16 volumes of poetry and 4 of non-fiction prose. They have been translated in many different languages.
- Rich has won many awards such as the Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize and the Lambda Book Award.



01 – “Diving into the Wreck”

Critical Appreciation

*I came to explore the wreck.
The words are puposes.
The words are maps
I came to see the damage that was done
and the treasures that prevail.*

(Diving into the Wreck)

Upon studying the life and works of Adrienne Rich one discovers that a lot of her literature envelopes a desire to educate her readers. The poem “Diving into the Wreck” is no exception. Adrienne Rich is of the view that women should not only feel as women but also express as women. This expression may consist of their domestic, social and moral individuality. This expression may look composed of emotional, intellectual and natural instincts. If the women are not free in their expression, they are not the real women. She has perfectly expressed her desire of identity in “Diving into the Wreck!”

*We circle silently
about the wreck
we dive into the hold.
I am she: I am he*

Adrienne Rich uses many poetic resources in her poem “Diving into the Wreck”. In this poem a diver goes on a trip to investigate a shipwreck. The diver goes on a journey where she discovers her true identity, both female and male. In this journey of self-discovery, the speaker encounters the shipwreck that is memory, kept intact by the depths of the sea.

*“Like memory, sea preserves traumas that can only be discovered
or inspected, never changed or revised.”* (Roger Gilbert)

In this poem, the poetess intends to explore a wrecked ship that is lying at the bottom of a sea. She says that she has read different stories about the wreck, but she does not believe them. She herself wants to examine the wreck and wants to know the truth about it. She gets ready and wears necessary dress of diving. The poetess goes down step by step into the water. As she is going downwards, she can move very slowly. She is somewhat afraid of the sea storm because she is alone. She feels that there is nobody who can predict the mood of the ocean.

Further, she says that at the bottom of the sea where the wreck lies, the environment is so comfortable that she can easily forget the purpose of her arrival there. She adds that her main purpose of the visit is to find out the damage of the wreck. The poetess turns into an androgyny and she is now a female as well as a male person. The poetess tells us that all the people, either coward or courageous, try to trace out the past of the human generation. They remember that in spite of their struggle, their names would not be included in the book of myths, and they would remain anonymous.

“Diving into the Wreck” is Adrienne Rich’s most celebrated poem. The poem gives a description of the sea and her dive into the sea, the various things observed and particular experiences underwent are all beautifully narrated and described. The poem is also adventurous because it is based on the search for wreck. Here diving into the wreck is not a simple adventure story, but Rich has a very serious account to relate. On the onset, it is a story of a diver going into the water to observe a wreck, but as the water is deep and mysterious so are the meanings

of the poem. Basically the poem is the struggle for women's rights in the male-dominated society. The poem is representative of not only Rich's ideals, but also the changing conditions of Americans at the time when the poem was written.

We are, I am, you are

.....

a book of myths

in which

our names do not appear.

Rich is unique in using metaphors. The image of the sea is a metaphor of life as sea is full of wreckages; the world too is full of ruins. One glance around will bring back countless pictures of destruction. "Diving into the Wreck" provides the angle of perception about the wreck from both the male and female side. The poem is hailed (*welcomed, praised*) as an epic of modern times. This statement is fully justified by the technical merits of the poem and the subject matter.

There is no writer of comparable influence and achievement in so many areas of the contemporary women's movement as the poet and theorist Adrienne Rich. Over the years, hers has become one of the most eloquent and provocative (*challenging, provoking, stimulating*) voices on women's problems. There is hardly an anthology (*collection, album*) of feminist writings that does not contain her work. A. Rich is a radical feminist with the vision of new world order. Feminism aims at consciousness rising in women. In words of Mary Daly"

"Women have experienced life only through the patriarchal perspective on the boundaries of patriarchal space."

Putting all the above details in a nutshell, we can say that Rich's poetry is replete with thought provoking lines, and innovative features of poetic talent. What makes her distinct, is not only her superb original style, but her subject matter and her unique handling of it. Her subject matters are generally taken from ordinary life but Rich has genius to transfer them in philosophical issues. Rich's poetry shows that she is a vivid observer of human life. Her poetry is unique with the seriousness of theme and descriptive power. All these features combine to make each poem, and her poetry unique for every reader. This quality urges readers to appreciate the poetry of Adrienne Rich.

"I simply believe that human society is capable of meeting the fundamental needs of all human beings. We can give them a minimum standard of living, we can give them an education, we can create an environment which is more healthy to live in."

(Adrienne Rich)



02 – “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers”

Critical Appreciation

*Aunt Jennifer’s tigers prance across a screen,
Bright topaz denizens of a world of green.*

Adrienne Rich is a writer who focuses on feminist poems expressing her anger. In most of her poems she likes to focus on female experience. One of the poems she wrote is “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers”. It is about a woman whose husband controlled her life almost as if he were her master, and she was his slave. She did what he told her to do, and did not do what he told her not to do. Aunt Jennifer tried to escape from her real world by doing things her husband didn’t want her to do. Adrienne Rich tells the readers that even though Aunt Jennifer was not able to live a free life, she still let her spirit live and did what she wished she could do through her creations. One of her creations was the Tiger, who will go on.

This truly is a poem that makes people appreciate the value of their freedom. Women need to realize to live for themselves on men. Adrienne Rich really stands up for herself to her husband the whole time she was married, and could not face him. The significance of this is that Aunt Jennifer had a spirit that would meet and beat anything that challenged her pretty than run away from it.

Here in this poem she describes **the plight of the women** who are dominated by their husbands and who live their lives in a state of mental confinement. In the poem “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers”, the poet Adrienne Rich expresses the life of Aunt Jennifer’s wishes to lead through artistic creations as she is trapped in an offensive marriage. Her tapestries poetry, her inner feelings conveying the constant terror she’s living in. The only way for Aunt Jennifer to escape the expectations of her husband is to live on, after death, through her artwork.

On the surface, the poems tells the story of Aunt Jennifer and her desires. Aunt Jennifer is so much dominated by her husband’s authoritative attitude that she remained terrified throughout her life. She will remain terrified even after death. The realization of the authoritative attitude of her husband is so torturing that the wedding band round her arm is now feeling like a heavy weight. She is tired and bored of daily busy routine of work. She has to do the artistic work in her little free time that she rarely has. Even than she remains afraid that her husband might not watch her. But, her art work will live on after her as a reminder of her unfulfilled dreams.

On a deeper level, the poem is packed with **symbolism**. The tigers in Aunt Jennifer’s needlework symbolize her longing for freedom. She is expressing her pain through art, creating a picture of how she’d like her own life to be. The tigers are not scared of men, as Aunt Jennifer fears her husband; they are powerful and brave animals. When Aunt Jennifer is faced with death, she is given a legacy through her art, and is finally free. In her needlework, the tigers are described as “prancing, proud and unafraid”, attributes that Aunt Jennifer deeply desire.

The tigers obviously have a very significant symbolic purpose in this poem. They portray the fearlessness, assertion and power that Aunt Jennifer displaces in order to lead her conventional life.

*When aunt is dead, her terrified hands will lie
Still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by.
The tigers in the panel that she made
Will go on prancing, proud and unafraid.*

“Aunt Jennifer’s Tiger” is a poem fully representing **A. Rich’s feminist ideas** as well as her concept of art. This is also an autobiographical poem that reflects the deep recesses of A. Rich’s mind and also the social mould in which she was thrown as a result of which she gives full vent to her feminist feelings in Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers. First, important theme to be running in the poem is the male-dominated society which leaves women with no choice but to be resigned to her fate whatever it is. Women are taken as nothing but commodity to be possessed by others. They are projected to be having no emotions of their own and so they must be dominated by the supreme authority of man. The tigers also represent art, which has permanent value as compared to the short-lived life of the artist who dies but whose art remains in the world. “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers” is a fine example of feminist poetry, which holds a banner of protest against the patriarchal society.

“Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers” is also an expression of imperialistic and psychological tensions of the 20th century in which especially woman find themselves as insecure and afraid of the patriarchal (*male-controlled, male*) social authorities. This is also a visionary poem, which dreams of a happy and fearless life free of male domination, which may give equal and parallel opportunities to the woman kind so that they can progress without male constraints (*restrictions, limitations*). Aunt Jennifer appears as a symbol of the oppressed women.

There is no writer of comparable influence and achievement in so many areas of the contemporary women’s movement as the poet and theorist A. Rich. Over the years, hers has become one of the most eloquent and provocative voices on women’s problems. There is scarcely an anthology of feminist writings that does not contain her work. **A. Rich is a radical feminist** with the vision of new world order. Feminism aims at consciousness rising in women. In words of **Mary Daly**:

“Women have experienced life only through the patriarchal perspective on the boundaries of patriarchal space.”

Putting all the above details in a nutshell, we can say that Rich’s poetry is replete with thought provoking lines, and innovative feature of poetic talent. What makes her distinct, is not only her superb original style, but her subject matter and her unique handling of it. Her subject matters are generally taken from ordinary life but Rich has genius to transfer them in philosophical issues. Rich’s poetry shows that she is a vivid observer of human life. Thus it is impossible not to appreciate the poetry of Adrienne Rich. Her poetry is unique with the seriousness of theme and descriptive power. All these features combine to make each poem, and her poetry unique for every readers. This quality urges readers to appreciate the poetry of Adrienne Rich.

“I simply believe that human society is capable of meeting the fundamental needs of all human beings. We can give them a minimum standard of living, we can give them an education, we can create an environment which is more healthy to live in.”

(Adrienne Rich)

03 – “Final Notation”

Critical Appreciation

*It will not be simple, it will take long
It will take little time, it will take all your thought
It will take all your heart, it will take all your breath
It will be short, it will not be simple*

There is no writer of comparable influence and achievement in so many areas of the contemporary women’s movement as the poet and theorist Adrienne Rich. Over the years, hers has become one of the most eloquent and provocative (*challenging, provoking, stimulating*) voices on women’s problems. There is hardly an anthology (*collection, album*) of feminist writings that does not contain her work. A. Rich is a radical feminist with the vision of new world order.

“Final Notation” by Adrienne Rich is a simple short poem having no stylistic ambiguity. However, the poem can be read at many levels, having layers within layers of meanings. The poem embodies the theme of hatred towards man and purely feministic thoughts. It can be described as a protest of a woman being exploited by man. In this male-dominated society woman is treated as a slave and as a thing which man can take anywhere at his own will.

*It will be short, it will take all your breath.
It will be simple, it will become your will.*

The poem can be interpreted in another way as well. It may be described as the description of the final stage of a man’s life-final notation or a message given from a death bed. From mystical point of view death is a sweet thing which takes away all the worries and cares of life in a few moments. It is not something which should be scared of. Leaving this world is not simple, but the balmy (*gentle, soft, pleasant, mild*) hand of death resolves all the problems. It draws soul from the heart, takes away breath and breaks the chain of life. Death takes away our soul to a place which nobody knows. In a few moments death destroys all the mighty plans of man and stops our breath from flowing out.

This is actually the journey of man’s life-the distance between birth and death. Man does not accept the reality of life and keeps on fooling himself by thinking that his death is not possible but when it takes him on headlong then he realizes that it is very simple. This is the destiny of man.

“Final Notation” is the thematically an ambiguous poem. This poem is not understood because of the flowing imagery or stylistically presented issues, but because of the reader’s individual perception of the poem. We can say that unlike Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers, which has a few fixed themes and issues, Final Notation is infinite in its interpretations.

“Final Notation” is a cultural, political and personally emotional poem which has been written in a simple and neat style with careful economy of words. The poet is experiencing new life styles, sexual issues, motherhood tensions, friendship or even doctor patient relationship. “Final Notation” shows the last message of the poet or the New World Order of a colonial power when it has controlled a territory or is coming to control it.

This is a fine, simple and little piece of poetry. The speaker is taken to be a lover and the addresser is the beloved. The lover is telling the beloved how to make love. The relationship between man and woman is very complex and this is the point to which the poet alludes (اشارہ کرتا، حوالہ دیتا).

The poem depends on the experience of the reader for various interpretations. The complexity of the poem is also caused by the extreme subjectivity (موضوعیت) in the poem. The poem is too personal to understand in its true perspective. The complexity is the typical characteristic of modern American poetry which is based on confessional and experimental nature of their artists.

Putting all the above details in a nutshell, we can say that Rich's poetry is replete with thought provoking lines, and innovative feature of poetic talent. What makes her distinct, is not only her superb original style, but her subject matter and her unique handling of it. Her subject matters are generally taken from ordinary life but Rich has genius to transfer them in philosophical issues. Rich's poetry shows that she is a vivid observer of human life. Thus it is impossible not to appreciate the poetry of Adrienne Rich. Her poetry is unique with the seriousness of theme and descriptive power. All these features combine to make each poem, and her poetry unique for every readers. This quality urges readers to appreciate the poetry of Adrienne Rich.

"I simply believe that human society is capable of meeting the fundamental needs of all human beings. We can give them a minimum standard of living, we can give them an education, we can create an environment which is more healthy to live in."

(Adrienne Rich)

04 – "Gabriel"

Critical Appreciation

*There are no angles yet
Here comes an angel one
With a man's face young*

There is no writer of comparable influence and achievement in so many areas of the contemporary women's movement as the poet and theorist Adrienne Rich. Over the years, hers has become one of the most eloquent and provocative (*challenging, provoking, stimulating*) voices on women's problems. There is hardly an anthology (*collection, album*) of feminist writings that does not contain her work. A. Rich is a radical feminist with the vision of new world order.

Traditionally 'Gabriel' is known to be the Angel of Revelation who used to bring the message of God to all the prophets. In the Bible, Gabriel has been introduced as the archangel who foretold the birth of Jesus to the Virgin Mary. In Islam, Gabriel revealed the Quran to Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). But in spite of this religious reference the poem does not carry religious connotation and has overtly secular tone. The reason is that the poetess is the product of the 20th century and she does not want to "Justify the ways of God to man."

At the very outset she declares that this is not an age of angels and if there comes one in the face of human being, he ultimately turns to be a serpent. Here is a clear reference to the political leaders of the age who claim to be the leaders and torch bearers of humanity, but they kill those in cold blood who dare to differ from their ideology.

Twentieth century is filled with tensions and confusions. Man in this century is suffering and undergoing various battles. He is enslaved by the materialistic desires and is devoid of spirituality and purity of the past and:

***“Nothing alive left in
their depths.”***

Thus like T.S. Eliot, Adrienne Rich laments at the fact that 20th century man is “hollow” from within and scattered from outside. Once upon a time angels used to bring the revelation of God unto humanity. At that time they used to give their salutations in golden and pleasant words and their way of talking was such as words like flashy and multicoloured ribbons were coming from their mouth. This shows that the poet is not totally up in arms against religion, but she is for the time being dazzled by the light of science and technology of 21st century. In spite of living in a faithless world she has not totally lost faith in the God.

Adrienne Rich says that the messenger of God – Gabriel – has not brought any new revelation for her. He is mute and the poet is also speechless, but they communicate with each other through intuition. The immense feelings of pleasure and passion need no language to express. Same is the case with poetess. She says that though Gabriel has conveyed her no revelation yet she can understand his message and the message is love of humanity. The solution of all the problems confronting man today is love. Love is the base of all the religions and it is only through the art of love and the art of words (dialogue) that we can save humanity from total annihilation / destruction / ruin (فنا، تباہی) and avoid clash of civilizations.

Putting all the above details in a nutshell, we can say that Rich’s poetry is replete with thought provoking lines, and innovative feature of poetic talent. What makes her distinct, is not only her superb original style, but her subject matter and her unique handling of it. Her subject matters are generally taken from ordinary life but Rich has genius to transfer them in philosophical issues. Rich’s poetry shows that she is a vivid observer of human life. Thus it is impossible not to appreciate the poetry of Adrienne Rich. Her poetry is unique with the seriousness of theme and descriptive power. All these features combine to make each poem, and her poetry unique for every readers. This quality urges readers to appreciate the poetry of Adrienne Rich.

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(Adrienne Rich)



Adrienne Rich as a Poetess

Main Themes in Rich's Poetry / Rich as a Feminist / Rich - A Voice of Oppressed Women

*The sea is not a question of power
I have to learn alone
To turn my body without force
In the deep element*

(Diving into the Wreck)

There is no writer of comparable influence and achievement in so many areas of the contemporary women's movement as the poet and theorist A. Rich. Over the years, hers has become one of the most eloquent and provocative voices on women's problems. There is scarcely an anthology of feminist writings that does not contain her work. **A Rich is a radical feminist** with the vision of new world order. Feminism aims at consciousness rising in women. In words of **Mary Daly**:

"Women have experienced life only through the patriarchal perspective on the boundaries of patriarchal space."

Upon studying the life and works of Adrienne Rich one discovers that a lot of her literature envelopes **a desire to educate her readers**. Her voice is said to be **the voice of oppressed women**. The poem "Diving into the Wreck" is no exception. Adrienne Rich is of the view that women should not only feel as women but also express as women. This expression may consist of their domestic, social and moral individuality. This expression may look composed of emotional, intellectual and natural instincts. If the women are not free in their expression, they are not the real women. She has perfectly expressed her desire of identity in "Diving into the Wreck!"

*We circle silently
about the wreck
we dive into the hold.
I am she: I am he*

So in the collection of poems described in the syllabus in particular and in her poetry in general Adrienne Rich is **a great champion of woman rights**. Adrienne Rich's poetry provides a chronicle of the evolving consciousness of the modern woman. Composed in a period of rapid and dramatic social change, her work explores the experience of women who reject patriarchal definitions of femininity by separating themselves from the political and social reality that trivializes and subordinates females. She herself defines a patriarchal society is one in:

"...which males are dominant and determine what part females shall and shall not play, and in which capabilities assigned to women are relegated generally to the mystic and aesthetic and excluded from the practical and political realms"

Rich is **unique in using metaphors**. The image of the sea is a metaphor of life as sea is full of wreckages; the world too is full of ruins. One glance around will bring back countless pictures of destruction. "Diving into the Wreck" provides the angle of perception about the wreck from both the male and female side. The poem is hailed (*welcomed, praised*) as an epic of

modern times. This statement is fully justified by the technical merits of the poem and the subject matter.

Feminism is one of the most obvious **themes** to be found in Rich's poems. Adrienne Rich is a writer who focuses on feminist poems expressing her anger. In most of her poems she likes to focus on female experience. One of the poems she wrote is "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers". It is about a woman whose husband controlled her life almost as if he were her master, and she was his slave. She did what he told her to do, and did not do what he told her not to do. Aunt Jennifer tried to escape from her real world by doing things her husband didn't want her to do. Adrienne Rich tells the readers that even though Aunt Jennifer was not able to live a free life, she still let her spirit live and did what she wished she could do through her creations. One of her creations was the Tiger, who will go on.

*When aunt is dead, her terrified hands will lie
Still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by.
The tigers in the panel that she made
Will go on prancing, proud and unafraid.*

"Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" is a poem fully representing **A. Rich's feminist ideas** as well as her concept of art. This is also an autobiographical poem that reflects the deep recesses of A. Rich's mind and also the social mould in which she was thrown as a result of which she gives full vent to her feminist feelings in Aunt Jennifer's Tigers. First, important theme to be running in the poem is the **male-dominated society** which leaves women with no choice but to be resigned to her fate whatever it is. Women are taken as nothing but commodity to be possessed by others. They are projected to be having no emotions of their own and so they must be dominated by the supreme authority of man. The tigers also represent art, which has permanent value as compared to the short-lived life of the artist who dies but whose art remains in the world. "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" is a fine example of feminist poetry, which holds a banner of protest against the patriarchal society.

"Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" truly is a poem that makes people appreciate **the value of their freedom**. Women need to realize to live for themselves on men. Adrienne Rich really stands up for herself to her husband the whole time she was married, and could not face him. The significance of this is that Aunt Jennifer had a spirit that would meet and beat anything that challenged her rather than run away from it.

The problem of identity of women is also one of the main concerns of Adrienne Rich. She is of the view that the women are not sure of the definition of identity. They do not want to become men. They do not want even to look like men. They simply want to look equal to men. Rich's views on the problem of identity of women are obvious in her poem, 'Diving into the Wreck'. On the onset, it is a story of a diver going into the water to observe a wreck, but as the water is deep and mysterious so are the meanings of the poem. Basically the poem is the struggle for women's rights in the male-dominated society. The poem is representative of not only Rich's ideals, but also the changing conditions of Americans at the time when the poem was written.

*We are, I am, you are
.....
a book of myths
in which
our names do not appear.*

Individualism may also be taken as a theme in Rich's poetry. In her poetry she has given a great deal of individualism to the woman of modern age. Her main concern is that

woman of modern age must be considered as the effective, dynamic and functional part of the society. Aunt in “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers” is a great artist. Her art of weaving is matchless. Aunt is representing the whole community of women. She is repressed physically under the weight of “Uncle’s Wedding’s Band” but she is free in her mind and soul that is why she is fearful but her creation ‘tigers’ are not afraid of men. This freedom of mind and soul, which is one of the basic rights of every individual are denied to woman under the male defined culture.

“Final Notation” is a cultural, political and personally emotional poem which has been written in a simple and neat style with careful economy of words. The poet is experiencing new life styles, sexual issues, motherhood tensions, friendship or even doctor patient relationship. “Final Notation” shows the last message of the poet or the New World Order of a colonial power when it has controlled a territory or is coming to control it.

Like T.S. Eliot, Adrienne Rich laments at the fact that 20th century **man is “hollow” from within and scattered from outside**. Once upon a time angels used to bring the revelation of God unto humanity. At that time they used to give their salutations (*greetings*) in golden and pleasant words and their way of talking was such as words like flashy and multicoloured ribbons were coming from their mouth. This shows that the poet is not totally up in arms against religion, but she is for the time being dazzled by the light of science and technology of 21st century. In spite of living in a faithless world she has not totally lost faith in the God.

Putting all the above details in a nutshell, we can say that Rich’s poetry is replete with thought provoking lines, and innovative feature of poetic talent. What makes her distinct, is not only her superb original style, but her subject matter and her unique handling of it. Her subject matters are generally taken from ordinary life but Rich has genius to transfer them in philosophical issues. Rich’s poetry shows that she is a vivid observer of human life. Thus it is impossible not to appreciate the poetry of Adrienne Rich. Her poetry is unique with the seriousness of theme and descriptive power. All these features combine to make each poem, and her poetry unique for every readers. This quality urges readers to appreciate the poetry of Adrienne Rich.

“I simply believe that human society is capable of meeting the fundamental needs of all human beings. We can give them a minimum standard of living, we can give them an education, we can create an environment which is more healthy to live in.”

(Adrienne Rich)

Name: _____